



Dear Friends,

In the spring of 1993, I observed a Great Blue Heron fly to a nest at Stow Lake where two enormous juveniles stood up and began grunting in the loudest possible way. I checked the breeding records and learned that my sighting was the first of Great Blue Herons nesting in the city!

That began my odyssey of studying the heron colony, and next spring we will celebrate 20 years of showing and educating the public about these charismatic birds at Stow Lake.

Studying the heron colony led me to start San Francisco Nature Education. We began by offering classroom visits and field trips to Stow Lake in 2000. Pretty soon we focused on underserved schools and expanded our program to winter classroom visits and field trips to the San Francisco Botanical Garden or Heron's Head Park.

By 2002, we were ready to offer Saturday programs for the public: first spring tours of the heron colony, and then *Birding for Kids* and *Birding for Everyone* walks at the SF Botanical Garden. Later we expanded our Saturday walks to include Chain of Lakes, Crissy Field, and Heron's Head Park—and now we offer 27 Saturday walks.

We serve 1,200 students during the school year, and concentrate primarily on underserved students in the Mission, Hunters Point, Bayview, and Portola Districts. When we have an opening because of a last-minute cancellation, we offer a winter or spring session to a class near the park which can easily walk to the field location. That was the case with New Traditions Elementary third-graders—see our story on this page.

Please support our school and public programs with a year-end donation. Membership is only \$30; a gift of \$1,000 sponsors two classroom visits and two field trips for a year-long field study program in San Francisco parks for underserved youth.

Thanks for your support.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

Executive Director

Please donate now, or mail a check to:
SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary, Ste. 208
San Francisco, CA 94118



Third-Graders Learn About Wings, Skulls, Bones in Halloween Special

Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator

On October 25th, just in time for Halloween, San Francisco Nature Education naturalists visited Mr. Matt Campana's third-grade class at New Traditions School. On the agenda: birds' skulls, bones, and wings.

The class visit started with an exciting slide show of the creatures that students can expect to see during their upcoming field trip at San Francisco Botanical Garden. After the slides of birds, squirrels, turtles, and gophers, Ms. Nancy showed some bonus slides including an Allen's Hummingbird, a Great Blue Heron, and a Great Egret. Everyone was delighted to recognize so many birds.

Students then participated at three interactive stations. The first was Draw-a-Bird, featuring two taxidermy birds: a Red-tailed Hawk and a California Quail. The students chose their favorite bird with great enthusiasm and then drew and colored their pictures. Mr. Campana now has a gallery of fabulous drawings for the classroom.

School program coordinator Anastasia Marin led the second station: How Birds Fly. The students held two different bones and compared them. Holding the bone



Two students help a classmate become a Barn Owl.

of a Brown Pelican made it clear that the bone was hollow and much lighter than a deer bone, which was dense and relatively heavy

Then students touched wings of a Barn Owl and Red-tailed Hawk, and compared the softness of the Barn Owl wing (good for nocturnal hunting and making no noise to alarm prey). With one student in the middle, two others held bird wings to his/her arms. The students loved their transformations into "real" birds! Then they examined an 18-inch long California Condor feather and a pen made with a feathered quill.

Three groups of third-graders rotated through Mr. Bill's "Beak Adaptation" study session. They talked about how different species of birds have different beaks that allow them to eat various kinds of food. The students looked at many things that birds eat, such as seeds, fish, frogs, mice, nectar, and insects, and then looked at real beaks from various birds.

The tiny hummingbird specimen had a needle-like beak for sipping flower nectar. Some of the other beaks Mr. Bill displayed were many times bigger than the entire hummingbird. The students enjoyed seeing the egret, pelican, and seagull beaks. They paid close attention to the shape of each beak and heard about how it allowed the bird to get food in its habitat. Brewer's Blackbird, Mourning Dove, and California Quail beaks were scrutinized by future ornithologists.

Another specimen seen was an eagle skull. A big sharp hooked beak lets the eagle tear its food into bite-sized pieces for baby eagles. The class was looking forward to seeing live birds on their field trip to Golden Gate Park next Thursday.

We wonder how many students would choose to be a Barn Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, or even a Great Blue Heron for Halloween? Trick or treat!

On the pages ahead:

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All photos: SFNE

Student feels the roughness of a Red-tailed Hawk wing.

Students examine an eagle skull at the Beak Station.

**Third-grade students
get their hands on
some skulls, bones,
and wings.**



Teacher Mr. Campana left; student with Red-tailed Hawk wings; school program coordinator Anastasia Marin.

Students sketch a California Quail.



Mr. Bill demonstrates adaptation with a jar of nectar and a hummingbird.



Student watches a Red-tail—like a hawk.

Beautiful Day in the Park for Bret Harte First-Graders

Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator



It was a beautiful day in the park on October 9th—the sun was shining, birds were singing, and San Francisco Nature Education naturalists were eagerly awaiting the arrival of a school bus from Bret Harte Elementary School. It was time for the first graders' field trip in San Francisco Botanical Garden!

Two groups of very excited students emerged from the bus: Ms. Cooper's and Ms. Medina's classes. Each class split up and headed in different directions. Right away, the students were in for a surprise. One of our naturalists, Bill Milestone, spotted a **Red-tailed Hawk** sitting on the overhang of a garden building. The students were able to take a good look at the bird's distinctive red tail. However, the real thrill came when the students observed that the hawk was eating a gopher! A bit later, they were also able to take a look at the gopher's innards on the ground. What a wonderful example of the food chain in action, and an experience that Ms. Medina's students won't forget for a long time.

The students were given cardboard binoculars to better spot the birds, and Ms. Medina's class, with naturalists Anastasia Marin, Bill Milestone, and Nancy DeStefanis set off for their trip. The students observed a large group of **Canada Geese** grazing on the meadow next to the Wildfowl Pond. Fascinated, the students stood in amazement, taking a good look.

The Wildfowl Pond didn't disappoint. The students spotted a pair of **Mallards** swimming alongside a pair of **American Coots**. A family of **Red-eared Sliders** was basking in the sun on a nearby rock, and the students admired these cute turtles for a while.

Then the students surprised the naturalist by pointing out a **Steller's Jay** feeding on a nearby pile of nuts. The bird's black mohawk and bright blue feathers continued to be a topic of discussion for a while.

Another group was fortunate to observe a juvenile **Great Blue Heron** at the Wildfowl Pond. The Dawn Redwood grove offered an opportunity to measure the trunk; spider webs were everywhere.

Everyone had a wonderful time in the park and they are looking forward to a field trip at Stow Lake in the spring!



Above: Red-tailed Hawk on the roof of a garden building.
Right: Bill Milestone shows students the structure of a spider web.



All photos: SFNE



Ms. Medina and her first graders.



Students measure the trunk of a Dawn Redwood tree.



Ms. Nancy and chaperone with their group.



Chaperone and students enjoy their hike through the garden.



Ms. Cooper and her group fly through the garden!

Bret Harte's October Field Trip

Linda Grant, Naturalist



On a sunny morning, Ms. Cooper's first-grade class from Bret Harte Elementary School arrived for a field trip in the San Francisco Botanical Garden. We began our walk in the Garden of Fragrance where the students used their sense of touch to feel the velvet-like purple salvia plant, the largest genus of plants in the mint family.

At the Waterfowl Pond the students were treated to close-up views of **Canada Geese**, identified by their long black necks and white "chinstrap." The geese feed on vegetable matter, including roots, tubers, seeds, and grass. Also observed at the pond were

some commonly seen **Mallards** and **American Coots**.

During the snack break a flock of **Rock Pigeons** flew overhead. The eager learners brought a field journal showing pictures of birds found in the botanical garden. They checked off names of the birds they had seen earlier. Each student also selected a bird to draw in their journal and some even drew two birds.

We saved the best for last, the "alone walk" through the Bamboo Grove. The students enjoyed this so much they went through three times—first alone, then with a partner, then with the entire class!

Everybody enjoyed this delightful day, and the field trip concluded with a well-earned lunch.



Student points to Canada Geese at the Wildfowl Pond.



Young student finishes her "alone walk" in the Bamboo Grove.

All photos: SFNE



Red-tailed Hawk at the Dwarf Conifer Pond.

First-Graders Fly Through the Garden

Missi Hirt, Naturalist



It was a beautiful fall day in the Botanical Garden for Ms. Cooper's enthusiastic class of budding naturalists. After a quick review of some of the field trip rules: "leave no trace," "love it and leave it," "share the path," and "how to be a good observer," we headed out on our journey. Not more than a few steps into the garden I pointed to a tree ahead where a **Red-tailed Hawk** was perched. It turned around and seemed to display its

red tail for us, and then flew right over our heads—astonishing! We later caught up to this same **Red-tailed Hawk** at the Dwarf Conifer Pond. It had hopped off a rock and was wading in the shallow water. We quietly sneaked away.

The garden's active sprinklers motivated us to sprint past the Dawn Redwoods. Next, we walked to a quiet bench, where we took a couple of minutes to be silent and to open our senses of smell, sight, and hearing. Down the path we spotted an **Anna's Hummingbird** and learned that hummingbirds are the only birds in the world that can fly backwards. Next we came to another pond, where

we saw **House Finches** and a **White-crowned Sparrow**.

Our next adventure took us hopping across the stones around the Moon Viewing Garden; here we spotted a couple of squirrels. On our way to the Wildfowl Pond we spotted several **Canada Geese** on the lawn. We stopped on the wooden bridge and saw some **Red-eared Sliders** sunning themselves on the rocks, a couple of **American Coots**, a **Western Gull**, and a male and female **Mallard**. While we saw many birds that day, it was also exciting to see the trees, plants, and changing terrain. This is truly the most diverse botanical garden on earth!

Birding for Everyone, October 6th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



We had a large and jovial group for this month's walk, and a beautiful blue-sky autumn day. As we were gathering in front of the bookstore, a couple of **Pygmy Nuthatches** climbed in the large pine trees outside the gate, very high up. Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis joined our group for the day, as did new board member Bill Milestone, so we had a broad base of expertise.

At the front lawn, we saw our first of several resident **Black Phoebes** perching and swooping. **Ravens** flew overhead, and **Scrub Jays** scolded. On the lawn was a flock of a

dozen fall migrant **Canada Geese**, grazing and resting on their journey south. We discussed how a few urban populations of Canada Geese are resident year-round, while most members of that species, including these,



Black Phoebe

Photo: Doug Greenberg

remain wild and adhere to very rigorous migration patterns.

Two **American Coots** were in the pond, a fall arrival. In the Asian Cloud forest we got plenty of long looks at the abundant

local **Anna's Hummingbirds**. We then took some time to observe and identify a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** who obligingly fed on some low bushes while we all got a look at his unique combination of olive-brown head and breast, pale yellow belly, and gray and white wing bars.

In the Moon-viewing Garden there was a lone **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**, and more Black Phoebes



Pygmy Nuthatch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

and Anna's Hummingbirds. We stopped in the Succulent Garden and got a fleeting glimpse of a **Pacific Wren**, another fall arrival. I initially identified this bird as a Winter Wren, but Pacific Wrens were given status as their own species apart from Winter Wrens in summer 2010.

As we traversed the garden we were treated to regular sightings of **Fox Sparrows**, **Song Sparrows**, and **White-Crowned Sparrows**, and heard the voices of all three as well.



White-crowned Sparrow

Photo: Judy Harter

could all see their distinctive bright yellow forehead, side, and rump patches. We also saw two **California Towhees**, and we could hear the high "yank-yank" calling of **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, though they were too high in the trees to allow a good look.

At the end of the walk, the so-called "**Red-breasted Sapsucker tree**" on the main lawn delivered on its promise, offering us all a glimpse of this beautiful bird before we wrapped up this delightful day.



Pacific Wren

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

At the reservoir two **Yellow-rumped Warblers** put on a display for us, perching on a tree overhanging the water and making short flights over the water so we



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Photo: Rick Leche

Upcoming Events*

Birding for Everyone: Led by Nancy DeStefanis and Bill Milestone, Saturday, Nov. 3, 10 am-noon; on Dec. 1, led by Alan Hopkins. Meet in front of San Francisco Botanical Garden bookstore. SF Nature fees: Adults \$10. Also see SF Botanical Garden fees below.

SF Botanical Garden Admission Fees: FREE for children ages 4 and under; FREE for all San Francisco residents with proof of residency; \$7 for adults; \$5 for youth 12-17, seniors 65 & over, and college students with ID \$2 for children 5-11; \$15 for families (2 adults and one or more children)

Leave from SF Botanical Garden bookstore. Take a leisurely walk through the microhabitats of the Botanical Garden. Free field journal provided to children. Please bring binoculars, if you have them, and a pencil for recording bird sightings.

Birding Crissy Field: With Megan Prelinger, Saturday, Nov. 10. Meet at warming hut. Tour: 10-12. Adults \$10, children free. This trip is very popular—come to see winter waterfowl and shore birds!

*Please see our new online [events calendar](#).

Volunteers Needed for 2012-2013 School Program! Please visit www.sfnature.org/get_involved for information.

Wish List:

One good microscope for our classroom visits, backpacks, binoculars.

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Brown Pelican in flight at Ocean Beach



Willet at Ocean Beach



Red-tailed Hawk over Baker Beach



Whimbrel at Ocean Beach

**Stalking Coastal Birds
Around the Sandy Edges
of San Francisco**

Photographs by Sandi Wong



Royal Tern over Ocean Beach



Marbled Godwit at Ocean Beach



Snowy Plover at Ocean Beach